DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 898 PS 029 240

TITLE	Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5.
INSTITUTION	Learning and Teaching Scotland, Dundee.
ISBN	ISBN-1-85955-670-1
PUB DATE	1999-00-00
NOTE	61p.; For related guides, see PS 028 472-473 and PS 029 234-243.
AVAILABLE FROM	Sales Department, Learning and Teaching Scotland, Gardyne Road, Dundee DD5 1NY, Scotland; Tel: 01382-443600; Fax: 01382-443645/6; e-mail: enquiries@LTScotland.com; Web site: http://www.LTScotland.com (5.00 British Pounds Sterling plus 2.50 shipping).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Child Development; Childhood Needs; Developmental Stages; Foreign Countries; *Individual Differences; *National Curriculum; Preschool Children; *Preschool Curriculum; *Preschool Education; School Readiness; *Student Evaluation; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS	Scotland

ABSTRACT

Recognizing the valuable early learning experiences that children encounter at home or in various preschool settings, this guide presents a curriculum framework for children aged 3 to 5 years in Scottish early years settings. The guide extends the advice offered in "A Curriculum Framework for Children in Their Pre-School Year" and provides additional advice for practitioners on the learning and developmental needs of younger children, and guidance on effective approaches to the curriculum for children as young as 3. Section 1 of the guide, "The Importance of Pre-School Education," delineates the underpinnings of a quality preschool experience, presents proposed aims of preschool education, discusses how play contributes to children's learning, examines the needs of younger children in educational settings, and presents considerations for practitioners as they implement the curriculum framework. Section 2, "Key Aspects of Children's Development and Learning," examines five key areas of child development and learning: (1) emotional, personal, and social development; (2) communication and language; (3) knowledge and understanding of the world; (4) expressive and aesthetic development; and (5) physical development and movement. This section also delineates educational objectives, and presents numerous examples from practice and questions for staff reflection. Section 3, "Promoting Effective Learning," examines the roles and responsibilities of adults in organizing for children's learning and the assessment process--presented as facilitated by teacher reflection and comprised of planning, observation, and assessment during staff interaction, as well as recording, reporting, and evaluation. Section 4, "Children as Individuals," addresses working with home and families, taking account of special educational needs, fostering equal opportunities, collaborating with other agencies, and supporting transitions. (KB)

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A CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR CHILDREN 3 TO 5

PS 029240

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Acknowledgement

With grateful thanks to Dundee City Council for giving us permission to take photographs at The Frances Wright Pre-School Centre and Foggyley Nursery School.

First published 1999

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ISBN 1 85955 670 1

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Note:
'Staff' and 'adult' have been used in this guideline to include all adults working with the children.
'Parents' has been used to include parents and carers.
'Early years setting' has been used to describe the range of different types of provision, including playgroups, nursery classes, nursery schools, etc.

Preface

This guideline contains a curriculum framework for children aged three to five. It recognises the valuable early learning experiences that children have at home or in various settings for pre-school education. These settings, for example playgroups, nurseries, parent and toddler groups and family centres, meet the needs of children and families in a variety of complementary ways. Each has its own approach to the curriculum, to the experiences that are offered to children and to the ways in which parents are involved.

Each makes a valuable contribution to supporting children's maturation and learning.

This guideline extends the advice offered in *A Curriculum Framework for Children in their Pre-school Year* (SOEID, 1997), and provides additional advice for practitioners on the learning and developmental needs of younger children, and guidance on effective approaches to the curriculum for children as young as three.

This curriculum framework is based on the fundamental principle of equality of opportunity. All education systems of quality must recognise that no individual or group should be disadvantaged on the grounds of race, gender, culture, disability, class, belief, lifestyle or family circumstances. Effective learning and teaching can only take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect and security. An inclusive approach is therefore essential to the provision of high quality learning experiences for all children.

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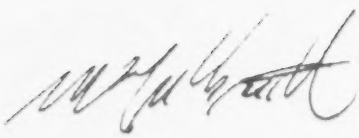
Foreword

Scottish CCC shares the Government's belief in the importance of pre-school education. The recent priority that has been given to the sector has enabled the Council to develop and extend its commitment.

The guideline addresses the learning and development needs of children from the time they enter pre-school education. It is intended to build upon their prior learning experiences and to describe the range of learning to which all children are entitled. It is, therefore, relevant to all who are involved in the education and care of young children.

In preparing the extended guideline, account has been taken of the responses to the consultation on the draft version issued in January 1999. The process was an important consolidation of the Scottish educational principles of partnership and co-operation and we are grateful to all who commented. The guideline provides a sound base on which to build coherent, continuous and progressive educational experiences for all young people in Scotland.



Neil Galbraith
Chairman

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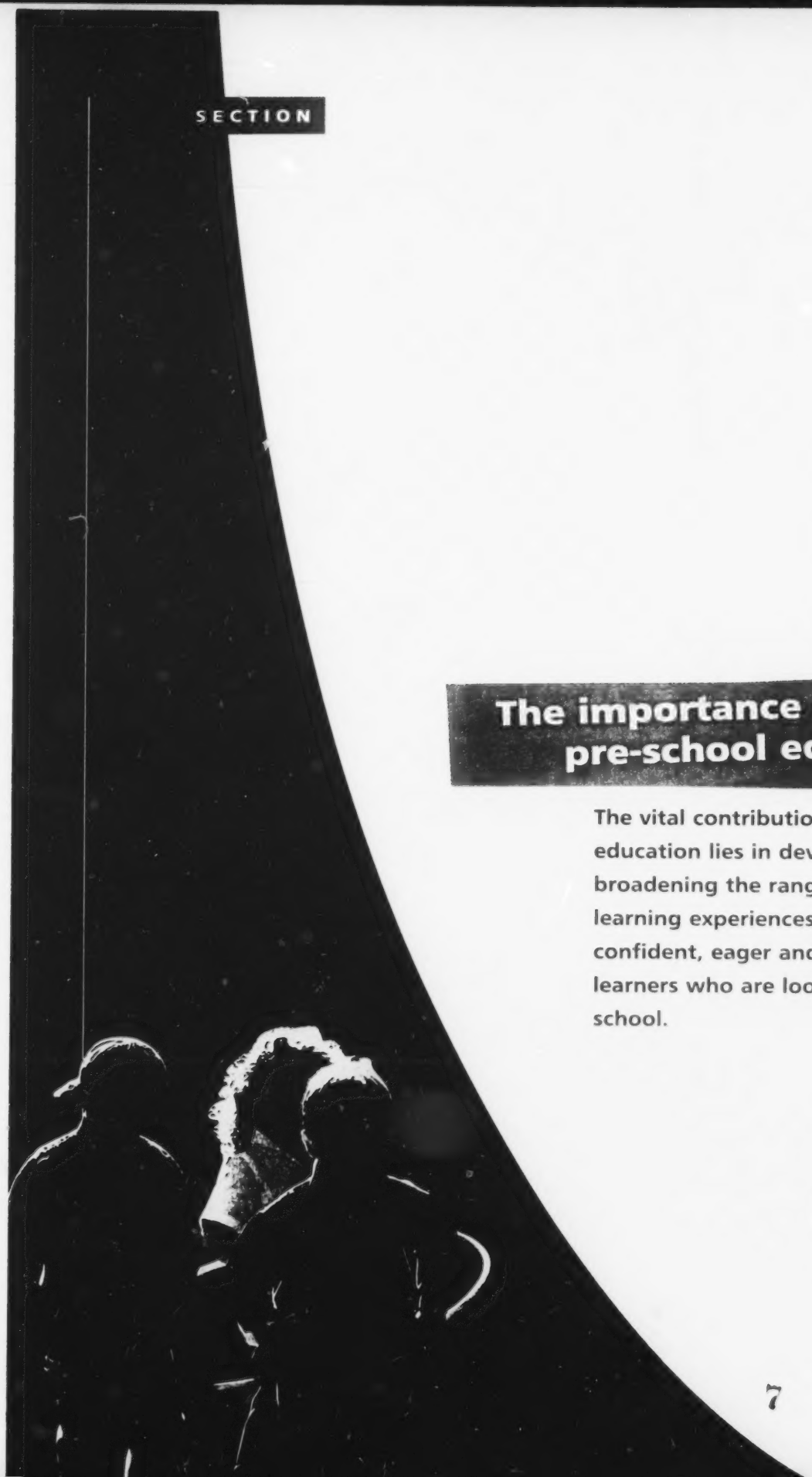

The importance of pre-school education

The vital contribution of pre-school education lies in developing and broadening the range of children's learning experiences, to leave them confident, eager and enthusiastic learners who are looking forward to school.

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The importance of pre-school education

The early years of children's lives are ones of rapid growth and development. They enter their pre-school years with a significant background of learning experiences within their family and with friends, neighbours and relatives. Many will have further experiences of learning through play in attending parent and toddler groups, playgroups or nurseries. During their pre-school years provision for children is continued in a range of settings in the private, public and voluntary sectors. At the same time many of a child's most valuable experiences will continue to take place in the home and the community.

Staff in pre-school education are therefore working in partnership with parents in developing children's learning. They should promote this partnership by learning about, valuing and building on children's learning experiences before and during their pre-school years. The vital contribution of pre-school education lies in developing and broadening the range of children's learning experiences, to leave them confident, eager and enthusiastic learners who are looking forward to school. Such an educational experience should be of the highest quality and based on the following:

- the best interests of children
- the central importance of relationships
- the need for all children to feel included
- an understanding of the ways in which children learn.

Having regard to the best interests of children means working with parents to recognise and give priority to meeting the individual needs of all children and at all times having regard for their welfare, safety and security.

It is necessary to recognise the central importance of relationships as the basis on which all learning takes place, whether in the early years setting or in the child's wider world.

The need for all children to feel included is of paramount importance. Participating actively from the earliest years has an important and positive part to play in ensuring children feel secure, are valued and have a sense of belonging.

The learning process is complex. All learners have particular ways in which they tend to learn successfully. Learning, to be effective, needs to build on what the learner already knows and an understanding of the ways in which children learn.

From these general principles pre-school education should aim to:

- provide a safe and stimulating environment in which children can feel happy and secure
- encourage the emotional, social, physical, creative and intellectual development of children
- promote the welfare of children
- encourage positive attitudes to self and others, and develop confidence and self-esteem
- create opportunities for play
- encourage children to explore, appreciate and respect their environment
- provide opportunities to stimulate interest and imagination
- extend children's abilities to communicate ideas and feelings in a variety of ways.

Education of Children under 5 in Scotland (SOED, 1994)

To achieve these aims involves much more than organising a set of resources for learning. Values and attitudes are communicated to children by what staff say and do and by the expectations set for their learning and behaviour. Children also learn from the quality of relationships among staff and between staff and children, and the co-operation of staff with parents and the community. In thinking about how these aims are achieved, it is therefore important to consider the ways in which staff value:

- the individual child
- equal opportunities and social justice
- partnership with parents/carers
- the importance of the community
- education as a life-long process.

Children as learners

Young children come to early years settings as active, experienced learners with a natural curiosity. They are unique individuals eager to make sense of their world, to develop relationships and to extend their skills.

Children develop understanding in many different ways but they learn best in an environment where they feel safe, secure, confident and have opportunities for enjoyment. Children deepen awareness of themselves as learners by planning, questioning and reflecting. They consolidate this learning when they have the time and space to engage in activities in depth. They develop theories through investigation, first-hand experience, talk and play.

Play makes a powerful contribution to children's learning. It provides opportunities for children to:

- make sense of real-life situations
- develop awareness of themselves and others
- explore, investigate and experiment
- be actively involved in learning
- draw and test their conclusions
- develop self-confidence
- express their ideas and feelings in many different ways
- inhabit imagined situations
- act out and come to terms with experiences at home or with friends
- be solitary, quiet and reflective
- collaborate with others
- take the initiative on their own terms
- develop relationships
- practise skills
- consolidate previous learning
- be challenged in new learning.

The role of adults is central in supporting and extending children's learning through play.

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Taking account of younger children

The development and learning needs of younger children can be different in nature from those of children nearing school age.

The starting point for all learning is the child and this requires a recognition of the particular experiences that children bring to the early years setting and the ways in which these are fostered and developed. For adults this often involves negotiating the balance between the younger child's struggle to achieve independence and their need for ongoing emotional support.

Play is, of course, a central part of learning at this stage. While many young children are capable of playing together for extended periods of time they may still need adult guidance and support. They may need encouragement and help from adults in order to learn how to interact with other children. Adults need to be sensitive to the young child's abilities to co-operate with others, to take turns and to wait for help.

During early childhood children's attention and memory are developing. They may at times have difficulty in focusing on detail and can be easily distracted. As they develop, their concentration span will gradually become more sustained, particularly when their interest is engaged and when adults provide just enough support to enable them to experience success.

This is a time of rapid growth in all aspects of children's development. Adults need to provide daily opportunities that encourage children to practise newly developed skills and to plan for experiences through which they will acquire confidence and competence.

While young children need an environment that balances familiar and predictable routines with challenge and surprises, their confidence in coping with new experiences needs to be supported by adults who offer emotional support, praise and encouragement.

In taking account of younger children it must be remembered that they need:

- lots of support and encouragement
- ongoing praise and reassurance
- opportunities to develop independence
- time to build relationships
- familiar routines
- time to engage in new experiences
- small and secure spaces
- time to be quiet and to rest.

In order to meet these needs adults should:

- listen to what children say
- have realistic expectations
- make time for one-to-one activities and discussions
- be flexible in planning
- be consistent in responses and praise
- know when to intervene
- give more direction when teaching new skills
- allow time for 'settling in'
- introduce new routines gradually.

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The Curriculum Framework

The curriculum framework refers to planned learning experiences based on different key aspects of children's development and learning. A curriculum framework helps staff to plan activities and experiences that promote children's development and learning in:

- emotional, personal and social development
- communication and language
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- expressive and aesthetic development
- physical development and movement.

Each of the key aspects is expanded in the sections that follow. Each aspect is described in terms of a number of features of learning. These set out a range of learning to which all children are entitled during their pre-school years. These emphasise the importance of emotional, personal and social development, the acquisition of literacy and numeracy, the contribution of creative and physical skills and an ever-increasing knowledge of the world to young children's development. Of course children will vary in the pace at which they develop and progress in these aspects of learning. The range of differences in children's development and learning is considerable in the early years. Nevertheless, all children should have the opportunity to participate in and enjoy the full range of experiences described.

To facilitate planning each of the key aspects is presented separately. In practice, learning ranges across these aspects and one aspect is frequently reinforced by others. For example, two children using a plastic cup to fill a bucket with water may be involved in counting how many cups are required to fill the bucket, in discussing the results with each other and in agreeing to take turns. They may therefore be developing mathematical, language and social learning. A series of examples from practice in early years settings has been included in each section to illustrate this inter-relationship. Alongside some of the examples are questions that highlight messages contained in other parts of this guideline, and some suggestions are given for planning and development of learning arising from the examples.

Considerations for practitioners

In planning experiences and activities that promote younger children's development and learning practitioners should consider:

- the extent to which contexts for learning link with children's own experiences at home and in the community
- the opportunities that are provided to build continuity between the home and the pre-school setting
- the range of opportunities for children to develop their social awareness and willingness to co-operate
- time and space given to engage in experiences and activities in depth
- the extent to which all children have the opportunity to feel included in activities and experiences
- the nature of adults' intervention
- the extent to which children feel challenged by activities and experiences
- the range of opportunities for children to be aware of and value differences.

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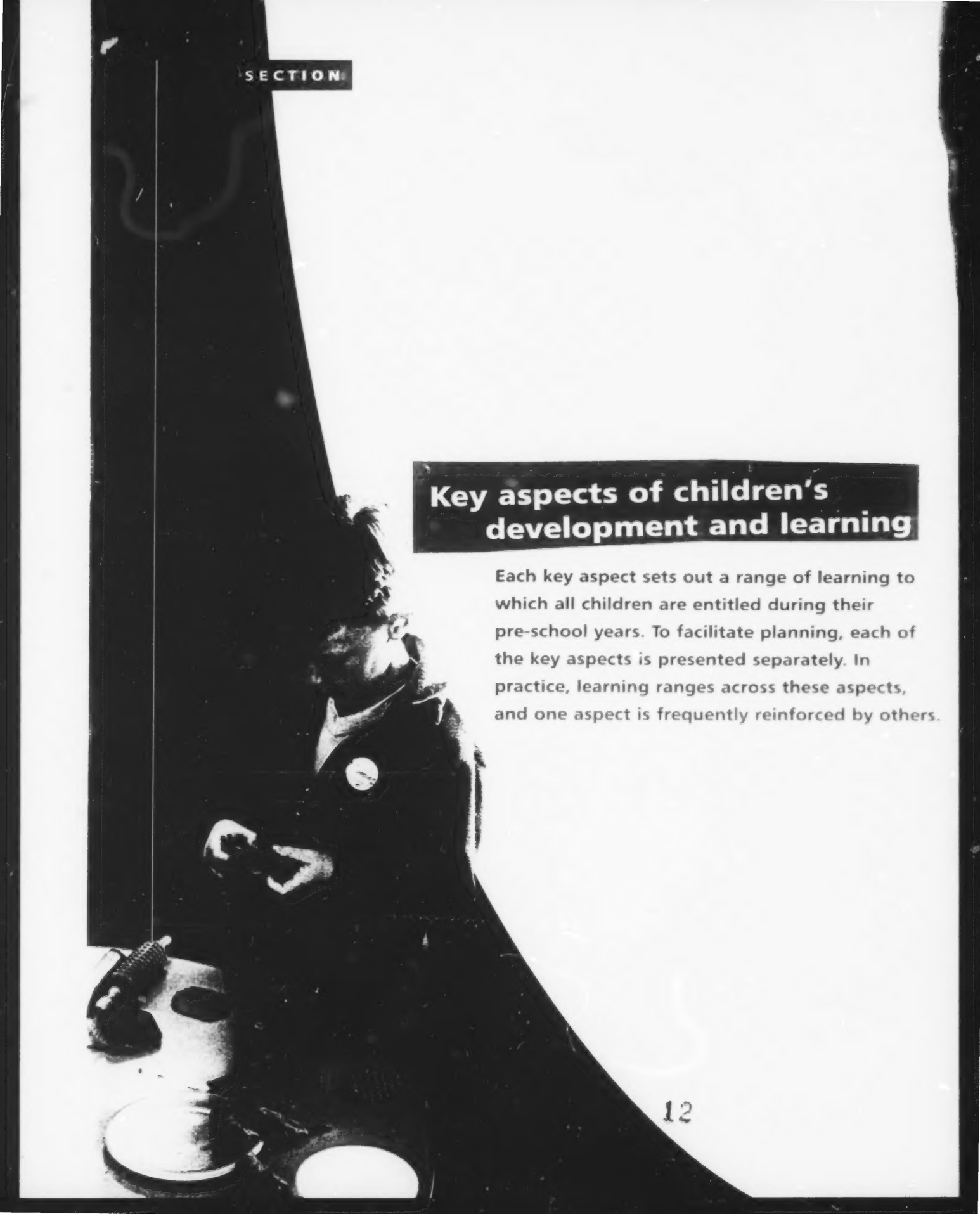

Key aspects of children's development and learning

Each key aspect sets out a range of learning to which all children are entitled during their pre-school years. To facilitate planning, each of the key aspects is presented separately. In practice, learning ranges across these aspects, and one aspect is frequently reinforced by others.

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Key aspects of children's development and learning

These are:

- emotional, personal and social development
- communication and language
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- expressive and aesthetic development
- physical development and movement

Emotional, personal and social development

Children's emotional, personal and social development is linked closely with other aspects of their learning.

Children in early years settings have to learn to cope with people and settings outwith the family. In doing so they need to become increasingly independent and able to form positive social relationships, particularly with other children. This is a significant step for very young children. It is assisted where there are secure, warm and caring relationships, where praise is given appropriately and where a sense of humour is encouraged. Feeling safe, confident and good about themselves is necessary in its own right. It is also necessary if children are to learn effectively.

The encouragement and support of staff will help children to develop self-esteem and self-confidence. Secure and stable relationships and careful supervision will help each child to feel safe and be able to express feelings. Children should be made aware of rules for their safety and know where help can be sought in cases of worry or upset. They should be helped to develop increasing independence in choosing, organising and tidying up during play, in dressing and personal hygiene and in serving themselves and others at snack- or lunch-time. They should be encouraged to persevere with tasks that at first present some difficulties but also know when and how to seek help.

The way that children feel about themselves affects the way they approach all learning and the way they behave towards others. As children develop confidence in themselves, they also form positive relationships with other children and adults, and begin to develop particular friendships with other children. In this process, they become aware of the needs and feelings of both themselves and others. Staff should encourage them to show consideration in their behaviour. They should make them aware that the need to consider others is often the reason for having rules.

As children form friendships and develop their skills, their play will often become more co-operative. Older children who have reached this stage will still enjoy and continue to need to play individually at times and this should be valued. Equally, the shift towards more co-operative play should be welcomed for the opportunities it brings for communication, learning to work in groups and to give and take.

Young children have a natural curiosity and sense of wonder that is important in emotional development. This can be fostered in simple ways through the observation of aspects of nature such as rainbows and the weather, the wonder of sunlight, night and day and new-born animals. Learning about cultural and religious festivals and events helps children to understand themselves, to build on their own experiences, for example of seasonal and religious celebrations, and to become aware of the beliefs and traditions of their own family and the way of life of others in their community. It helps to promote positive attitudes towards others in our multicultural society. Opportunities to care for others and for the environment will help children to develop positive attitudes and make them aware of ways that they can help.

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The expression of feelings and responses to the natural world can be encouraged through story-telling, role play, looking at pictures and singing songs. In this way children can experience a range of feelings and human responses that help them grow emotionally. These same activities can help develop sensitivity to the needs, feelings and interests of others. This is an important part of personal and social development and helps raise awareness of different values and attitudes that will be encountered in a world of cultural diversity.

In emotional, personal and social development, children should learn to:

- develop confidence, self-esteem and a sense of security
- care for themselves and their personal safety
- develop independence, for example in dressing and personal hygiene
- persevere in tasks that at first present some difficulties
- express appropriately feelings, needs and preferences
- form positive relationships with other children and adults, and begin to develop particular friendships with other children
- become aware of and respect the needs and feelings of others in their behaviour, and learn to follow rules
- make and express choices, plans and decisions
- play co-operatively, take turns and share resources
- become aware that the celebration of cultural and religious festivals is important in people's lives
- develop positive attitudes towards others whose gender, language, religion or culture, for example, is different from their own
- care for the environment and for other people in the community.

The importance of emotional, personal and social development cannot be over-emphasised, particularly for the youngest children. For them, arrival in new and strange places can be an anxious and unsettling experience. They should be supported by providing a clear settling-in period with familiar routines and lots of support for both the child and the parent.

The links with home need to be made obvious and using techniques such as 'all about me' books can be helpful in building the bridge between the child's home and the early years setting. Older children can provide positive role models and partners in learning for younger children and can have a positive influence on the younger children's self esteem and confidence.

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Examples from practice

Children's emotional, personal and social development is linked closely with other aspects of their learning.

One of the children went into hospital to have grommets put in her ears. The house corner was set up as a hospital with a bed, dressing-up clothes and hospital props. A display of hospital books and pictures was set up at the book corner.

Most children started to visit the 'hospital' regularly, taking part in lengthy role play and discussion, taking temperatures, putting on bandages and recounting their experiences of doctors and hospitals.

It is important to provide support where children might be afraid or apprehensive.

The children were encouraged to help in a practical way.

This provided a good context for children to talk about their different learning.

Staff also spent time in the 'hospital' observing the play, asking questions about the patients and events, and introducing some new vocabulary. Some children were given some reassurance about what happens in hospitals. The children made cards to be taken to the hospital to cheer up their friend. Staff also sat with children in the book corner, reading stories about doctors and hospitals, and encouraging the children to look at the books and talk about them. The local health visitor came to the nursery to talk about her work at the local health centre. When the child returned everyone welcomed her back. They were delighted to see how well she could hear and enjoyed exchanging information about hospitals with her.

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Examples from practice

A tea room had been set up in the house corner. Some of the children were preparing food and others were dressed up to serve it at snack-time. One ch'd, who was often restless, kept running into the tea room, shbuting and asking for food. Some of the children were getting very annoyed.

The member of staff took the child aside and talked about how he was upsetting other children. Everyone would get a turn to work in the tea room. When his turn came, the staff praised the sensible way that he had behaved. When he was collected the member of staff mentioned this to the parent and asked for encouragement at home.

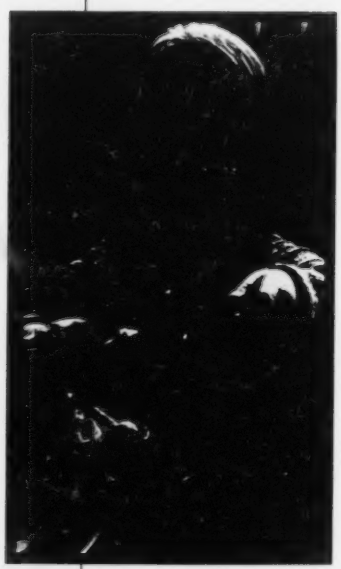
One of the staff noticed how much more settled he was after a period of energetic physical play. His keyworker made a point of starting the day with some physical play. Over a period he became much more settled in the nursery.

Some points to consider

How would you respond to this situation?

Was this an appropriate use of praise?

What do you think that the child learned from this situation?



Examples from practice

Shamila joined a nursery class in the middle of the first term. She was reluctant to stay at first and the staff invited her parents to stay with her. She quickly settled in but seemed to be very quiet and have a limited understanding of English.

Her mother noticed that the children often baked cakes and biscuits for snack-time and that sometimes parents led this activity. She suggested that she could make naan bread and chappatis with the children.

At the next baking session the nursery nurse helped Shamila's mum to make the mixture for the chappatis. Most children passed by the activity. However, as the adults began to stretch the chappatis a group of children gathered, one of whom was Shamila. 'What are you making?' asked one of the children. 'We eat chappatis at home' answered Shamila before any of the adults could respond.

Some points to consider

How would you respond to this situation?

What other activities could involve parents in helping children to learn about our multicultural society?

What might be the next steps in learning for Shamila?

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Examples from practice

Sharing information with parents will help to support the child.

Two of the children attending a community playgroup catering for two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half year-olds had recently experienced the arrival of a second child in the family.

A great deal of 'parent and baby' role play was being observed by staff. This included some rather aggressive play with the dolls.

It is important to provide support when children may be anxious or upset by change in their lives.

Staff decided to set up the house corner with a baby bath with water, bubbles, sponges, flannels, a cot, high-chair, dolls, clothing and other props. They provided books about babies for the book corner and included a photo album where all the children were encouraged to provide photographs of themselves as a baby.

Most children began to play regularly in the house corner, bathing the dolls, engaging in lengthy role play and discussion.

This provided a good context for children to talk about themselves and their feelings.

Staff spent time observing the play, assisting when asked to and encouraging the children. They were able to encourage the children's play by asking questions and introducing some new vocabulary. They used the opportunity to talk about caring for one another and the needs of small babies. They found that the aggressive handling of the 'babies' became less frequent.

What began as a way of encouraging positive relationships and increasing self-esteem also led to children learning about their own growth and development of skills (Knowledge and understanding of the world) and taking on new vocabulary (Communication and language).

Staff also used the book corner as a place to talk about when the children in the group were babies, using the photo album to encourage discussion and inviting the children to think of all the things they had learned as they grew. They encouraged the children's feelings of self-esteem by helping them to see how much they had developed and how much they could now do. The parent of the child who had been experiencing difficulties with the new baby brought the baby to the playgroup. The baby was bathed by the parent with the help of some of the children and then clothed and fed. The children were interested and involved and this provided a good context for talking about caring for others and discussion about 'when I was a baby' and 'my baby likes'. The children directed many of their questions and comments to the baby's brother, making him feel important and proud of his baby.

The children were encouraged to help in a practical way.

Some points to consider

How would you respond to this situation?

What further activities could be planned that would help the children to develop self-esteem and encourage them to consider the feelings of others?

What other methods could be used for involving parents?

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Examples from practice

Young children often have difficulty settling in to a new environment.

Links with parents and carers are important if a child is to become settled and feel secure.
A welcoming attitude that encourages parents to be part of the settling in process is crucial.

Providing a familiar object can add to a child's sense of security.

Encouraging positive relationships with other children and adults will help children to begin to develop particular friendships and feel involved.

Learning to settle in with others also provided a good opportunity to introduce Jamie to books, stories and rhymes in a small group (Communication and language).

Jamie, three years old, is a new arrival at playgroup. He is having difficulty settling in, and separating from his father is distressing him. This is upsetting other children in the group.

The two members of staff agreed that one of them would be the chief carer of Jamie, making sure that she was free to greet him and his father on arrival and inviting them to look at all the activities on offer.

Jamie's father was encouraged to stay with him, involving himself in whatever Jamie found of interest. The member of staff stayed close at hand, showing interest in Jamie's play and involving herself gradually. She drew Jamie's attention to other children and encouraged other children to play alongside Jamie. She asked Jamie's father if Jamie had a particular toy or comfort object that he might like to bring from home with him. This added to Jamie's sense of security and his growing willingness to come to playgroup.

Gradually, as Jamie became more involved and settled, his father was able to say goodbye to him without distressing him. Towards the end of each session the member of staff observed that Jamie would become unsettled again. She encouraged him to sit with her and a small group in the book area. This allowed her to calm Jamie by reading books and singing songs and he was able to watch for his father's arrival from the window.

Some points to consider

How do you think the approach taken helped Jamie?

What do you think he learned from the situation?

How do you think you could further build on his experience?

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Communication and language

The development of communication and language is linked closely with other aspects of their children's learning.

The development of children's skills in language is central to their abilities to communicate in relationships and learning, to understand ideas and to order, explore and refine their thoughts. From birth, children are part of a communication and language system that includes the body language of gesture, facial expression and movement as well as verbal language. Children will bring their own experience of understanding and using language in the home and community to the pre-school setting. Their home language should be valued and encouraged so that children can respond confidently to adults and other children, and express their own needs, thoughts and feelings. It is important to allow children to express themselves in a language in which they are comfortable during free play and social activities.

The pre-school years are an ideal stage at which to enrich children's language experiences by exposing them to different languages. At this age most children acquire language rapidly and easily from activities and experiences with a confidence that is difficult to achieve at later stages of their development. Some pre-school centres use Gaelic as the medium of learning, and some provide bilingual support for children in Gaelic or community languages, or offer experience in a European language in addition to English.

All of the opportunities to learn and use language that are detailed on pages 18–22 are as appropriate to learning other languages as they are to learning English. They therefore describe a language curriculum for all languages. The emphasis given to the development of children's competence in English and to the development of skills in other languages will vary appropriately with the aims of the centre and the needs of the child. However, it is important in such contexts to ensure that their overall language development is carefully monitored where the language used as the medium of learning is different from their home language.

In all types of pre-school provision, children should have opportunities to listen during social activities and play, to listen and enjoy music, songs, stories and rhymes, and to listen to instructions and information from staff. In some situations, children should be asked to listen with particular care and the reasons for careful listening should be explained to them.

They should also have opportunities to talk for a variety of purposes, for example to describe their needs and experiences, to ask questions, to take part in conversations, to talk about parts of stories, poems or rhymes, to explain and to make predictions. Careful listening and the use of open-ended questions by staff will help children to talk with increasing confidence and for different purposes. Engaging in one-to-one conversations with children allows adults to introduce new vocabulary and to encourage children to extend their phrases and sentences.

Children should be encouraged to develop an enthusiasm for stories and books by hearing wonderful stories and rhymes, by re-telling familiar stories, by browsing through books together and by using them to find interesting information. As well as realising that reading can unlock the meaning from print, children should also be encouraged to develop a curiosity about words, how they sound, the patterns within words and how they are composed. Captions and labels should be displayed and read together. Children's names should be recorded for them so that they become familiar with their own names. They should begin to acquire an easy familiarity with the names of some letters and their shape and sound. Many words in the environment will also become easily recognised as children make visits and excursions around their locality. In talking about stories and books, staff should introduce some of the language of books such as 'story' and 'page', and point out the directions of print.

In order to help children experience and understand the purposes of writing, there should be opportunities for them to experiment with their own drawings, 'mark-making' and written communication using suitable writing materials such as pens, pencils, crayons, paint and chalk. Writing is a way in which ideas and thoughts can be exchanged. For younger children this can be expressed through drawings, mark-making and in the exchange of drawings, cards and messages. The use of captions and scribing will help them to recognise the link between the spoken and written word. The use of pictures, charts, familiar letters and words will help children to distinguish between the use of upper and lower case letters, especially in their own name. Some children will be able to write their own name using both upper and lower case letters.

In communication and language, children should learn to:

- have fun with language and making stories
- listen to other children and adults during social activities and play
- listen with enjoyment and respond to stories, songs, music, rhymes and other poetry
- listen and respond to the sounds and rhythm of words in stories, songs, music and rhymes
- pay attention to information and instructions from an adult
- talk to other children or with an adult about themselves and their experiences
- express needs, thoughts and feelings with increasing confidence in speech and non-verbal language
- take part in short and more extended conversations
- use talk during role play and re-tell a story or rhyme
- use language for a variety of purposes, for example to describe, explain, predict, ask questions and develop ideas
- use books to find interesting information
- recognise the link between the written and spoken word
- understand some of the language and layout of books
- develop an awareness of letter names and sounds in the context of play experiences
- use their own drawings and written marks to express ideas and feelings
- experiment with symbols, letters and, in some cases, words in writing
- recognise some familiar words and letters, for example the initial letter in their name

Young children need lots of opportunities to have fun with words and to enjoy familiar songs, finger play and rhymes. They particularly enjoy songs with lots of repetition and this helps to anchor their newly developed abilities and encourages them to use more complex language structures.

Adults can provide good models of language by listening to children, taking time to talk with them in one-to-one conversations and helping them to understand the need to 'take turns' during conversations. It is important to remember, however, that young children vary greatly in their language abilities and adults need to be sensitive to this when planning activities in which all children can participate. Children who are reticent and unwilling to speak in front of others will need lots of support, encouragement and time.

Encouraging young children to talk about pictures, to 'read' picture books and to re-tell favourite stories to adults and other children provides a foundation for later reading skills.

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Examples from practice

Robert came in one morning with news of the birth of his sister. He had brought a photograph of her when she was two hours old.

A group of children gathered round with one of the staff to hear the news and look at the photograph. The child was asked to describe how he had visited his mum and the baby in hospital and had held the baby. He talked well about the visit and told everyone how excited he had been. The children listened carefully and some asked questions. Many of them began talking about their own smaller brothers and sisters. Everyone in the group took part in the conversation. More photographs appeared the following day, some showing the children as babies. A display was made and children looked at the photographs. They were encouraged to talk about how they had grown and changed since the photographs were taken. They also talked about some of the things that they could now do on their own. Many of the children painted expressive paintings of babies in their families.

Children often talk and listen well when they: are talking about personal experience, are interested in the topic, have a picture, object or photograph to focus their attention.

What started as a discussion (Communication and language) ended as learning about their own growth and change (Knowledge and understanding of the world) and was a creative and aesthetic experience.

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Examples from practice

While out for a walk, a child noticed a car with an 'L'-plate. 'Look that's what my mummy's name starts with!'

The meaning of the 'L' plate on the car was discussed with children. An alphabet book was used to find other words beginning with 'L'. With adult help, children's names beginning with 'L' were identified and a display made on the wall. Two children listened to and sang an alphabet song from a tape.

Some children went on to construct an 'L' plate from big blocks. Picture books about cars, a driver's licence and a copy of the Green Cross Code were added to the display. A play mat with small cars, road signs and figures was set out and some children played with this over a few days.

A small group of children continued to point out letters from captions in the nursery. Staff decided to plan some learning experiences that would build on this in the coming weeks. These included looking at alphabet books with the children, playing games such as 'I Spy', encouraging the children to observe as staff were writing their names on their paintings and talking about the initial letter and sound of their own name.

Some points to consider

How could this be developed to enhance children's learning?

How could parents be involved?

Examples from practice

A parent was reading nursery rhymes to a group of children. She missed out the last word of each line and the children called it out and laughed.

'Try this one,' she said 'Humpty Dumpty sat on a fence!' The children called out the correct word. A few children made up their own examples for others to guess.

Later the children were shown rhymes in big book from which they could easily follow the words and were beginning to identify key words. They were shown the same rhyme in a small book and a big book and the children compared the rhymes and found the corresponding words.

Some points to consider

What other ways can you use to help children enjoy nursery rhymes?

How could the children be encouraged to take a lead in this activity?

How could interest in words and their sounds be developed further?

How could parents be involved?

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Close links between home and the centre enable children's learning needs to be picked up on and met.

Children need to be able to talk to other children and adults about themselves and their experiences.

In a secure environment children will listen with enjoyment and express their own feelings.

Children were using language for a variety of purposes. They were playing co-operatively, sharing resources whilst they developed their self-confidence (Emotional, personal and social development).

Examples from practice

It was autumn and the children had been talking about light and dark as the nights grew longer. Some of the younger children's parents were talking about their children being afraid of the dark at bedtime.

The book corner was developed by adding books about night time. Children were encouraged to talk about their feelings about the dark.

As the children became more confident, another book corner was placed in a dark corner and children huddled together to hear stories about the night read by torchlight. Children chose to play in this area with books and torches, showing increasing confidence in both coping with the dark and expressing feelings in talk and non-verbal language.

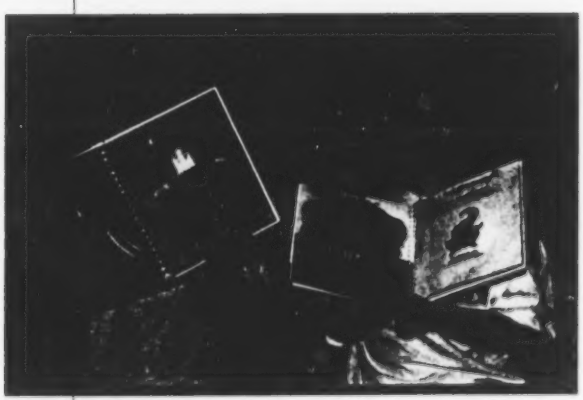
Some points to consider

How were the children's feelings about the dark used to enhance their learning?

What evidence is there that this approach was effective?

What other approaches could you use to continue to encourage children to express their needs, thoughts and feelings?

How could parents be further involved?



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Examples from practice

Observant staff can pick up on areas of need.

On looking at the balance of activities over the day, the adults realised that the children, especially the very young boys, were not taking opportunities to listen to stories.

Involving parents and explaining aims will help children to learn.

The centre had a 'Boys and Books Week' when dads and grandpas were invited and encouraged to read from story books before taking their children home.

Providing positive role models is an effective method of encouraging children's interest.

Staff took the time to explain to parents and carers the importance of children seeing men reading and enjoying books. Staff were particularly sensitive to children who came from a one-adult household.

Children were encouraged to pay attention, respond to stories and develop the ability to handle books.

The young boys continually returned to the books on their own, revisiting the stories that had been read to them.

Some points to consider

How would you have responded to this situation?

What other activities might involve parents/carers in helping children to enjoy books?

How would you maintain the interest of the boys in books and stories?

What might the next steps be to further encourage an interest in books and reading?

Knowledge and understanding of the world

Children's developing knowledge and understanding of the world is linked closely with other aspects of their learning.

From their earliest days, children try to make sense of their world. Their natural curiosity drives them to explore and understand their environment using their senses, and at times to wonder at its beauty and scale. They investigate their environment in a variety of ways: by observing shapes, colours, patterns and sequences of events in their surroundings; by asking questions; by matching, sorting and counting, comparing and learning to name and categorise; by listening and tasting and smelling; by touching and handling and exploring; by recording in pictures and models; by experimenting and investigating, designing and making and guessing and experimenting; by role playing and problem solving.

All of this active involvement by the child leads to a growing range of skills in investigating. It also broadens children's knowledge of people and places in their community. By visiting other places in the locality and observing and talking about the routines and jobs of people that they meet in the nursery and the community, they will extend their experience of home and family. Through television, computers and travel they may experience a wider environment and become aware of some differences in other times and places.

They will also develop interests in their natural surroundings, including familiar animals and plants. They readily become involved in the care of plants and pets, and should have opportunities to explore and recognise features of living things. They delight in their own rapid growth and the changes that it brings to their capabilities. They increasingly become aware of the passing of time in their own daily routines and the changing patterns of weather and seasons. As they handle and use a variety of materials in their play, they learn about their properties and uses.

The children's environment is one in which technology is important in their everyday lives. As children use blocks, put on a warm jumper, look through a magnifying glass, clamber on to a climbing frame, use a computer or travel by train, they become aware of the everyday uses of technology in the home, in transport, in communication and in leisure.

They should also become aware of their own health and safety at home, in the centre and outside, and of some of the risks that they should avoid. Encouraging children to adopt healthy habits in diet, exercise and hygiene brings immediate and lasting benefits.

Through activities that involve sorting, matching, comparing, classifying, and making patterns and sequences, children, often in play contexts, will develop their mathematical knowledge of number, measurement and shape.

They should have opportunities to use and understand mathematical language such as 'heavier', 'bigger than' or 'square', and to identify and use numbers in counting games, songs, rhymes and during play experiences. Some will become familiar with some larger numbers such as house or bus numbers from their own environment. They should use their growing understanding of mathematics to solve simple practical problems.

In developing their knowledge and understanding of the world children should learn to:

- develop their powers of observation using their senses
- recognise objects by sight, sound, touch, smell and taste
- ask questions, experiment, design and make, and solve problems
- recognise patterns, shapes and colours in the world around them
- sort and categorise things into groups
- understand some properties of materials, for example soft/hard, smooth/rough
- understand the routines and jobs of familiar people
- become familiar with the early years setting and places in the local area
- become aware of everyday uses of technology and use these appropriately (scissors, waterproof clothing, fridge, bicycle)
- be aware of daily time sequences and words to describe/measure time, for example snack-time, morning, first, next, clock
- be aware of change and its effects on them, for example their own growth, changes in weather, trees, flowers
- care for living things, for example plants, pets at home
- be aware of feeling good and of the importance of hygiene, diet, exercise and personal safety
- develop an appreciation of natural beauty and a sense of wonder about the world
- understand and use mathematical processes such as matching, sorting, grouping, counting and measuring
- apply these processes in solving mathematical problems
- identify and use numbers up to ten during play experiences and counting games
- recognise familiar shapes during play activities
- use mathematical language appropriate to the learning situations.

Helping the youngest children develop their knowledge and understanding of the world needs special consideration. For them, the world is only what they experience, they have little understanding of other points of view. Nevertheless, the way that they see the wider world is often fresh and vivid. In planning activities in this key aspect adults need to locate them firmly in play contexts that are real and meaningful to children. Familiar daily routines such as counting the number of jugs to fill the water tray or setting up the correct number of places at the snack table can also provide contexts for the development of understanding in this key aspect. The adult's role in supporting children as they develop their curiosities is to provide an interesting range of learning opportunities and to ensure an appropriate level of support and reassurance for children.

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Examples from practice

As part of a seasonal theme, a member of staff brought a selection of bulbs for planting indoors and outdoors. A book was prepared on how to plant a bulb.

Children use similarities and differences to name, sort and categorise objects. This helps them to organise their thoughts.

Bulbs were laid out on the table and the children were encouraged to look at, touch and smell them. After discussing the different types of bulbs, and with help from the adult, the children sorted out different categories by identifying properties of size, shape and colour. The adult and the children used pictures to help them to identify and label the bulbs. The adult had prepared a book on how to plant a bulb that consisted mainly of pictures with a few words of instruction. Together they looked at the book and progressed through each step of planting the bulb.

Learning about the world provides good opportunities to introduce children to information books.

Learning experiences spread over a series of days help to sustain interest and to develop continuity in learning.

Two children became very interested in the bulbs. They began to take them out of the dark cupboard every day to see if they needed water. The bulbs were taken out of the cupboard when they had grown sufficiently. The children were taken to the local park when the spring bulbs were in bloom. They discussed the beauty of the park and ways that they could take care of it so that everyone could enjoy it.

Examples from practice

Children learn to sort and match using familiar, interesting contexts. Counting animals of each type gives them practice in instantly recognising a number of objects however they are arranged.

Lots of practical experience gives children confidence with number, which helps them when they move to ideas such as 'one more' or 'one less' and to written representations of number.

A nursery nurse had set out plastic animals (four lions, three tigers and two monkeys) on the interest table following a previous discussion with a group of children who had expressed an interest in 'wild animals'. She encouraged the children to match and count the number of animals.

She extended this activity by introducing small sets of toy elephants, giraffes and bears. She discussed the names of these animals then asked the children to match and count them. She increased the size of sets for two children who were responding confidently. The children were then asked to lay out a set of their favourite animals, and to ask each other how many were in the set.

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Examples from practice

A playgroup had been helping the children to learn about different people who worked in the village. The postie had arrived with mail and the parents had asked her to come and talk to the children. The children asked where she had come from that morning and how some of the letters travelled so far. Discussions took place about how her job changed in different weathers.

Books and pictures were provided and dressing-up clothes including hats and bags were put out for role play. Letter- and card-writing material for the children to use was made available. Parents took them to visit the village post office and buy stamps, paper, envelopes and postcards. A post office was set up in the play-room where the children had opportunities to write their own messages and send them to each other.

Some points to consider

Which aspects of knowledge and understanding of the world could be developed from this experience?

What opportunities does this offer to develop aspects of communication and language? Which aspects would you focus on?

How might you develop the post office further?

Examples from practice

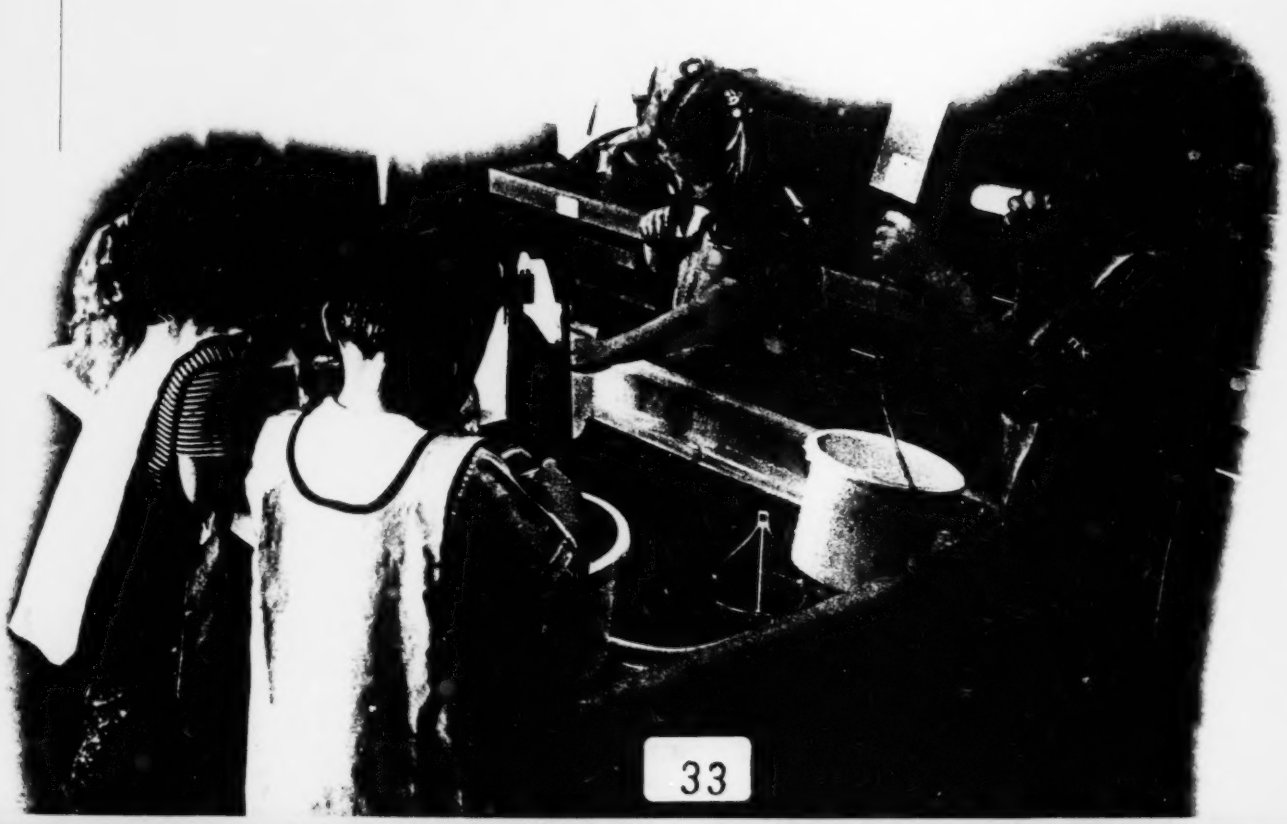
A group of children was building with large wooden blocks. One child announced that she was building a house (there were new houses near to the nursery and some children had been taken to look at the patterns of the bricks). Another asked where the door was, 'because you need a door to get inside'. Someone else laughed and said, 'It's only two bricks high, you are too tall to fit inside!'

The group decided they would build a house big enough for one of them to fit into and the teacher wondered how many layers of brick they would need. Three children stood next to the wall and they all agreed on the smallest child, Joanne. She stood beside the house so that the children could see how near they were getting. After a bit she became restless and then someone said, 'We could use the rods instead.' Two children solved the problem by joining some rods from a construction kit together until they were about the same height as Joanne. They propped up the rods beside the house so that everyone could join in the building.

Some points to consider

What mathematical language would you introduce/practise with this group?

What play activities might extend these children's interest in height or other aspects of measurement?



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Practical experience gives children confidence to experiment and discover things themselves.

Hands-on experience can help to sustain interest and encourage children to try out ideas for themselves. Children can gain an understanding of sequencing and reapply this process through play.

Children can begin to understand the properties of materials.

Children are developing increasing control of fine movements of fingers and hands (Physical development and movement).

Younger children learn through playing alongside others and need opportunities to repeat and practise new skills.

Learning can develop in different directions – planning is needed to enable this to happen.

Examples from practice

The children at nursery had been planting sunflower seeds.

Staff observed one three-year-old girl who had just helped to transplant some seedlings. She went immediately to the sand tray and 'planted' a seed, going through the whole procedure carefully and with concentration.

Several children joined her at the sand tray and began to play alongside each other. A three-year-old boy began to fill a small container, silently piling the sand higher and higher. Another four-year-old began digging a hole, scooping out the sand and scraping his trowel along the bottom of the tray.

'I'm digging a deep hole', he said, inviting the other two children to join in. They looked up to watch what he was doing and then continued silently with their own activities.

Staff discussed their observations at the end of the session. They decided to provide several plant pots of varying sizes and additional digging and planting equipment. They agreed that they would continue to observe the play at the sand tray closely. In particular, they decided they would focus on the play of the younger children to determine whether they were having any difficulty in joining in or whether they were simply enjoying playing alongside others.

Some points to consider

How would you respond to this situation?

Which aspects of knowledge and understanding of the world could be further developed from this starting point?

How would you continue to ensure that you were meeting the needs of all the children whilst developing the play further?

Examples from practice

A baking activity was provided at the playgroup for small groups of three-year-olds to make bread.

Using different ingredients, mixing and kneading allows children to begin to understand properties of materials.

A member of staff asked each child to select a mixing bowl and spoon, and together the children and adult looked at the recipe card. The children were asked to count out the number of cups of bread mix, followed by the correct number of spoonfuls of water.

Real experience helps children to become confident with number and introduces them to mathematical concepts and language.

The recipe required that the children knead their dough for a short while, followed by letting the dough rest. The children were encouraged to make their dough into rolls, so that they would have enough for their snack and also be able to take some home for the members of their family. This involved children calculating, dividing the dough and estimating equal portions. The rolls then had to be left to rise, which interested the children as they checked to see when their dough had become bigger.

Children calculate, estimate and predict in order to solve simple practical problems.

Children's interest can be sustained over a period of time.

The children set the timer to time the 20 minutes their rolls would take to cook, and checked on progress half-way through as the recipe suggested. When the children were ready to eat their rolls, they set their own place at the snack table.

Children become aware of time, methods of measuring time and words that describe time.

Some points to consider

What mathematical language would you introduce to the children?

How were the children supported to develop their mathematical knowledge of number, measurement and time?

What further opportunities does this activity offer to develop other key aspects of development and learning?

Expressive and aesthetic development

Children's expressive and aesthetic development is linked closely with other aspects of their learning.

Expressing and creating ideas, feelings and imagination as well as having opportunities to enjoy all manner of sounds, sights, shapes and textures are vital parts of the young child's development. They contribute to their confidence and self-esteem, and add colour and richness to life. They contribute to children's learning about themselves and the world, and to the development of social, intellectual, physical and communication skills. In developing expressive and aesthetic experiences the emphasis should be on the enjoyment, expression and learning that takes place during the experience rather than on finished products.

The early years setting should be a place where all of the children's senses are engaged and stimulated. It should be an environment where children's creations contribute to displays and decoration. In designing and making, opportunities should be provided for children to investigate and use a variety of materials and techniques, and to explore line, shape, form, colour, tone, pattern and texture in two and three dimensions. They should be encouraged to use pictures, paintings and constructions to create their personal view in response to what they see and experience.

Children readily enter different worlds in role play, movement, dance and drama, when they recreate and invent situations at home, in the wider community and in their imaginations. They will use movements, gestures and facial expression alongside spoken language as they become absorbed in role play. Staff should appreciate the value to children's personal and social development of acting out and exploring situations together. At times, they should intervene where role play is observed to need support from a member of staff by joining in the role play or by suggesting a new context or situation or by the addition of a resource.

Children should have opportunities to enjoy music in all its forms, participating in playing instruments, singing, moving rhythmically and expressively to music, creating their own music and listening to music. Regular opportunities should be provided for them to listen to sounds, rhythms, nursery rhymes and a wide variety of music, and respond through movement, singing, clapping and creating their own music using percussion instruments and everyday objects.

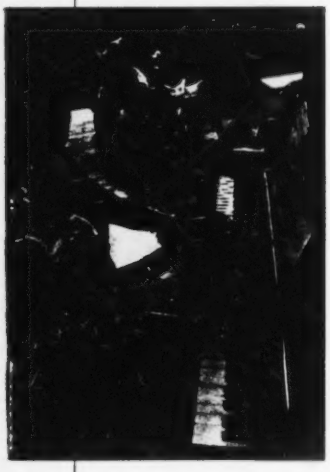
In expressive and aesthetic development children should learn to:

- investigate and use a variety of media and techniques such as painting, drawing, printing and modelling with fabrics, clay and other materials
- express thoughts and feelings in pictures, paintings and models
- use role play or puppets to recreate and invent situations
- use verbal and non-verbal language in role play
- listen and respond to sounds, rhythms, songs and a variety of music
- make music by singing, clapping and playing percussion instruments
- use instruments by themselves and in groups to invent music that expresses their thoughts and feelings
- move rhythmically and expressively to music
- participate in simple dances and singing games.

Helping younger children find ways into expressive and aesthetic experiences requires adults to consider their developmental needs and the responses they make to new materials and activities.

When very young children first encounter new situations and activities they often need time to simply watch and observe before they feel ready to join in. This careful and often totally absorbed watching can be an important stage in learning how to cope with something new and exciting. It also helps give children the necessary degree of self-assurance before they become involved as participants.

Adults need, therefore, to be sensitive to this and to the child's general state of readiness and willingness to be part of an activity or to try out new materials. Ensuring that ample time is made for these preliminary stages is of great importance.



Once the child has become personally committed and involved, adults need to provide opportunities to explore the potential of the new materials or activities in different ways, whether it be, for example, paint or clay or musical instruments. Although these activities can often be messy and noisy, they are an important part of the learning process.

Examples from practice

Four children were observed making a 'stage' with large blocks and playing at being dancers.

Learning can develop in different directions. Planning should allow this to happen.

Some children continued to build bigger and better stages to use during role play. Others were provided with dressing-up clothes, skirts and waistcoats, and an adult read and discussed some books about dancing with them. A group of children were taken to the library to find more books. Music was played on the cassette recorder for the children to listen and dance to. Several other children began to get involved, either as watchers or as dancers. Some colourful fabrics were provided and children began to use them as scarves to move about when they were dancing. Music with different paces and moods was played for children to respond to in their dancing.

The use of dressing-up clothes and props can extend the possibilities of role play for children.

A variety of other expressive and aesthetic experiences resulted from this experience.

A parent who taught a local dancing class was invited to come in to the nursery and show the children some dance steps. Children looked at photographs of a dance display and talked about the costumes. They were invited with their parents to watch a dancing class. Some parents organised a visit for all the children and accompanied them. The children had a very enjoyable and informative session watching and talking to the dancers.

Parents can provide access to experience in the local community. Their organisational skills can be valuable in allowing staff to extend learning beyond the centre.

The visit continued the interest in dance and the nursery staff planned over the ensuing weeks to introduce music and dance from a variety of cultures.

Examples from practice

A group of children was admiring a display of spring flowers that had been set up so that they could look at the flowers and smell them.

The children and adult talked about the colours and shapes of the flowers and touched them gently and held them against their faces. The children were excited when they were asked if they would like to try to arrange their own bowl of flowers.

In small groups they set out their collection of flowers and began to try out arrangements. They talked about whether large flowers should go at the back or at the sides and whether the same colour of flowers should go together. A lot of time was spent looking at the flowers closely and some children were starting to use the names of the flowers in conversation. A ladybird was found on one set of flowers and was carefully taken outside.

The children decided on their arrangements. They were gathered together and everyone talked about what they liked about each arrangement. The arrangements were carefully set out on a table in the entrance and a caption was made up together and written for parents.

The next day pictures and paintings of flowers surrounded the children's display. They talked about the pictures and many of them wanted to paint flowers. Their paintings were bright and expressive.

Some points to consider

Which aspects of learning were developed here?

How might you record children's responses during this activity?

What did this add to the experience?

Why was painting left to the end of this activity? Why do you think the children's paintings were 'expressive'?

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Children were encouraged to express their ideas and feelings and to use their imaginations . . . sensitive adult interaction helped the children to explore their responses.

Children were developing their skills of observation and using their senses (Knowledge and understanding of the world).

An opportunity was provided for children to investigate and explore with a variety of objects.

Children were encouraged to listen to other children and to use language to express their feelings (Communication and language).

Examples from practice

A collection of beautiful and interesting items were hidden in a basket full of straw and placed in an enclosed and cosy area of the nursery. Children came and went as they pleased. They examined each item as it was discovered. The adult supported the children's explorations and discoveries by discussing each item with them. The children were encouraged to discuss the texture, shape and colour of each item.

In the basket there were containers – jewellery boxes, small silver containers, large boxes made of wood. There were marble eggs, a brass rocking horse, a silver dolphin. The children were encouraged to explore as many items as possible.

It was observed, however, that some children chose a favourite item and tended to stick with it. One boy in particular chose a lilac-coloured marble egg and held it closely to his face and mouth, feeling its cold, smooth surface. He looked in a large mirror to see himself and sat for a long time, gazing, holding the egg to his cheek.

As the session came to an end, the children placed the items back in the basket, packing some of them carefully inside the containers. One child was observed placing his own valuable toy, brought from home, alongside the other items in the basket.

Some points to consider

How might you record children's responses?

How would you build on what was observed?

How might you further the children's learning by following their interest in particular objects?

How would you allow this activity to lead to other aspects of development and learning?

Physical development and movement

Children's physical development and movement is linked closely to other aspects of their learning.

The early years are a time of rapid physical and mental development as young children learn to control and use their bodies and become aware of what they can do and what it is possible to do. These are exciting times for children as they grow and change in shape and size.

Children's physical development is influenced by their growing confidence and enjoyment of physical play, by their increasing ability to control their own bodies through movement and by their physical well-being and strength. As children develop, they become faster, stronger, more mobile and more sure of their balance, and they start to use these skills in a wider range of physical activities. As they develop physically children also begin to become aware of themselves as individuals. This developing sense of identity is linked closely to their own self image, self-esteem and confidence.

Through opportunities for physical play, children become steadily better at those skills requiring co-ordination of different parts of the body, for example hands and eyes for throwing and catching, legs and arms for skipping with a rope. They become aware that they can use their bodies to express ideas and feelings by moving in different ways as they respond to their moods and feelings or to music or imaginative ideas. As they do these things, children explore what their bodies can do and become aware of their increasing abilities. They also become aware of physical play as both an individual and a social activity: in playing alone or alongside others, in playing with a partner in throwing and catching, in using a seesaw or push cart, or in joining a game with a larger group. Physical activities can provide opportunities to promote social skills such as sharing, turn-taking, co-operating and negotiating, and encourage the development of values such as honesty, fairness and respect for others.

Energetic play that involves running, jumping and skipping helps children to develop balance and co-ordination as well as an appreciation of distance and speed. Children's awareness of the space around them and what their bodies are capable of can be extended by climbing and balancing on large-scale apparatus such as a climbing frame, wooden logs and a balancing bar and by using small tricycles, bicycles and carts. Within these contexts children should be encouraged to seek personal challenges that encourage a degree of risk taking but which are set within a safe and supportive environment.

Opportunities for physical activity should be provided both inside and out. Regular sessions of physical play indoors or visits to local sports or leisure centres are particularly important when the weather limits opportunities for outdoor play. The outdoors can provide a scale and freedom for a type of play that is difficult to replicate indoors, for example opportunities to dig a garden, explore woodland, run on the grass, roll down a grassy slope or pedal a car across a hard surface. Visits to swimming pools, where these can be arranged, can help children to enjoy and gain confidence in the water at an early stage.

In order to develop their fine motor skills, children should have opportunities to handle scissors, pencils, brushes and crayons. They should work with construction materials, jigsaws and other small apparatus to improve hand–eye co-ordination and hand control. By working with food, fabrics, wood, clay and other natural and manufactured substances, children's skills in using different materials and a range of tools can be extended and they will develop increasing control of the fine movements of their fingers and hands.

Children should be increasingly involved in developing the skills required to take care of their own bodies, for example washing and dressing themselves, cleaning their teeth and becoming more independent at mealtimes. They should be encouraged to feel good about their growing range of physical skills and to enjoy the feeling of well-being that good health and physical play bring. They should be helped to understand safe practices when using small apparatus or tools such as a hammer, saw and scissors.

In physical development and movement children should learn to:

- enjoy energetic activity both indoors and out and the feeling of well being that it brings
- explore different ways in which they can use their bodies in physical activity
- use their bodies to express ideas and feelings in response to music and imaginative ideas
- run, jump, skip, climb, balance, throw and catch with increasing skill and confidence
- co-operate with others in physical play and games
- develop increasing control of the fine movements of their fingers and hands
- develop an awareness of space
- be safe in movement and in using tools and equipment
- be aware of the importance of health and fitness.

Younger children have particular characteristics in relation to physical development and movement that require adults to consider how best to ensure these are properly addressed. Adults can support this key aspect by planning learning opportunities that allow children to practise both fine and large body movements and by being enthusiastic participants in exercises and games. Simple movements involving stepping up, jumping and hopping provide valuable opportunities for the development of the co-ordinated use of large muscle groups. In the same way, making time to fasten buttons, pour water, hang up coats and put on clothes is important in helping to develop finer co-ordinated movement.

The energy levels of the youngest children are very variable. One moment they will be very active and boisterous, the next tired and in need of rest. It follows that adults must be sensitive to these changes in energy levels and ensure there are places and opportunities for quiet and rest as well as planned occasions for energetic activity.

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Examples from practice

Apparatus was set out to provide opportunities to develop specific skills.

Climbing equipment had been set out in the outdoor area to develop children's skills in climbing and balancing. A ladder and some planks had been positioned leading from the frame to make balancing easy or more challenging.

The task was modified because of staff observation of this child's particular needs.

Peter, who had mobility difficulties, was observed trying to get on to one of the low planks. He was unable to do this as the plank was too narrow to allow him to keep his balance.

Practising in this way develops skill and confidence.

The adult replaced the low plank with a chute, which was much wider. This gave him more confidence and he repeatedly used the chute, persevering in a way that was unusual for him.

Record keeping is a valuable means of tracing significant signposts of children's progress over time.

Over the next few weeks he used a variety of equipment to develop balance, such as stepping stones and low benches for walking along. Some five months later, the adult's record noted 'Peter was excited because he could now walk unaided along a narrow plank joining two "A-frames"'.

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Examples from practice

A new child arrived at the playgroup. Watching another child hammering a nail into a piece of wood at the woodwork bench, she attempted to copy what she had seen but her grip on the hammer was not suitable.

The leader gathered all ten children together to teach them how to hold and use the hammer safely and properly. The adult took the opportunity to talk to the children about the use of other equipment in the woodwork corner and demonstrated the use of the saw, the vice and the hammer and nails. The children were also shown how to put the tools away after use. During the next few days the child's interest continued and she made a large wooden aeroplane. During this time she was observed and given further help by a parent helper. Her parents were encouraged to let her use tools at home.

Some points to consider

Why was it important to gather all the children together here?

How could this lead to other aspects of development and learning?

In what other ways could this new child be helped to settle in?

Activities need to be planned that enable children to enjoy activities both indoors and out.

Children developed an awareness of space and explored different routes for the wheeled toys.

Children were able to solve problems and co-operate with each other to arrive at solutions.

Fine movements of fingers and hands were needed to produce the result the children desired.

Children were able to record their discoveries in a meaningful way.

Examples from practice

The nursery had recently been out for a walk, during which the children had noticed and become very interested in road works that had changed the traffic flow.

Later, a group of three-year-olds were observed using wheeled toys, being 'organised' by one child using a one-way system.

Staff followed the interest up by taking the children back to look more closely at the new one-way system, talking about why it was there, looking at the holes made for new water pipes and introducing new vocabulary. One child asked what would happen if you 'went down the up road'.

On returning to the nursery, the road play-mat came out and the children tried out different routes. The one-way system in the outdoor play area was further developed by the children. Over the next few days the idea emerged that the children should draw their own map showing the route to nursery and the one-way system. Staff provided pens, paints and collage materials. Children were encouraged to look at maps, photographs and plans.

Some points to consider

How did the adults build on what was observed?

How did this lead to other aspects of development and learning?

How did the various resources provided encourage the development of specific skills?

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Examples from practice

Children were encouraged to move in a variety of ways to express their feelings.

A large space was prepared by the adult so that the children could move freely. A variety of percussion instruments and a selection of taped music was provided.

The adult played a tape of Scottish Country Dance music and began to dance. Soon, children began to join in, skipping and jumping. They practised and explored different ways of moving – running, twirling, waving their arms.

The adult added long, satin ribbons to stimulate ideas for movement. The children used the ribbons to fly, swirl, fold, fall and trail on the floor.

What began as a way of using movement as a medium for expression also led to children working co-operatively with one another and joining in (Emotional, personal and social development).

Some children preferred to watch those dancing, and some chose a percussion instrument to play. Large pieces of brightly coloured material also encouraged further exploration by the children. Some made flags or cloaks, others made leads to 'walk the dog'.

Children listened and responded to a variety of music and sounds (Expressive and aesthetic development) and gained confidence in the use of musical instruments.

After a while, some children took their material, lay down and wrapped themselves up in it. The adult played some soft, soothing music and the children lay listening and relaxing.

Children enjoyed energetic activity and a feeling of well-being.

Some points to consider

How did this activity allow the children to develop skills and confidence?

What next steps would you take to continue to promote creative ideas in movement?

Why was it important to use a variety of props and stimuli?

Section 2

Promoting effective learning

The starting point for learning is the child. Children's previous experiences and achievements, their needs and interests, and the individual ways in which they learn are important factors in their progress in each of the key aspects. Adults have a vital role to play in supporting children's learning.

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Promoting effective learning

The roles and responsibilities of adults in organising for children's learning

The starting point for learning is the child. Children's previous experiences and achievements, their needs and interests, and the individual ways in which they learn are important factors in their progress in each of the key aspects. Adults have a vital role to play in supporting children's learning. In planning for children's learning adults should consider both the needs and achievements of the child and the range of learning experiences that will help children to progress in different aspects of their learning and development.

Every adult working in an early years setting is part of a team. In order that the team plan and organise effectively it is necessary for all those involved to understand different developmental stages and to work together with shared approaches, attitudes and expectations.

To promote effective learning in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect adults need to be consistent and realistic in their expectations and their responses to children. Developing warm, supportive relationships with children and other adults creates a climate in which children feel confident to tackle new challenges and where children can see mistakes as part of the learning process. For younger children familiar daily routines such as 'welcoming' and 'farewell' help to foster a sense of belonging and develop the social awareness so vital to successful learning.

Many play opportunities should be freely chosen by the children from a broad range of activities and experiences. This allows them to develop interests, to try out different ways of learning and to explore materials and relationships. Adults need to be sensitive to ways in which they extend children's learning through play. Intervention by adults should support or extend the learning experience, increase its level of challenge or channel children's interests into a broader or more balanced set of learning experiences.

In addition to interaction during some play experiences adults should use regular short periods of time to develop particular aspects of learning with small groups and individual children. This allows adults to stimulate interests, to teach and develop skills and to revisit and extend previous learning.

In planning the overall programme adults should take account of different stages of development and ensure a balance between group and individual activities. There should also be time to be quiet and rest.

In planning for learning it is important to take account of the physical environment. The space available needs to be carefully organised to allow for a range of different activities. Where possible the outdoor and indoor areas, including the surrounding neighbourhood, should be used as resources for learning.

Children should have easy access to resources that encourage them to be independent in their learning.

Just as children will vary in the achievements they bring to the setting, they will also develop and make progress at their own pace. Adults need to take account of this in matching learning activities and experiences to the needs of the child. To do so involves effective assessment.

The assessment process

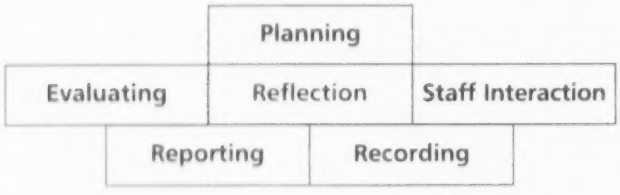
Assessment should be an integral part of the daily routine in an early years setting. It occurs as adults listen, watch and interact with a child or group of children. Wherever possible staff should find ways of involving children in the process.

The purpose of assessment is to provide useful information about children's learning and development that can be shared with other staff, parents and the child, and which will be helpful in informing future planning.

Although each aspect is described separately in the text, each aspect is interrelated in the assessment process. For example:

- setting goals for learning (planning) will highlight aspects for observation and assessment during play
- record keeping will gather the information needed for effective reporting
- evaluation of learning and teaching will influence future plans.

This interrelationship is illustrated in the diagram below. It shows the common assessment process that informs decision making about learning and teaching in both early years settings and primary schools.



Reflection

Reflecting on practice is at the heart of the assessment process. Taking time to step back and to reflect on what has been successful in children's learning and what might have been planned differently enables staff to make changes that promote more effective learning.

Reflection should be an integral part of planning, observation, recording and reporting, and will be most effective when staff take time to share and shape their perceptions with other colleagues.

Planning

Effective planning establishes clear goals for learning that are designed to match the needs and achievements of children. Planning, whether long or short term should leave staff clear, confident and well-prepared for what they are trying to achieve in children's learning. Sharing this information with children and parents will assist the learning partnership.

The descriptions of key aspects of children's learning in this guideline should help the process of planning a broad and balanced curriculum. The descriptions should also be useful in setting long- and short-term learning goals for individuals and small groups of children based on assessment information. Although staff should plan a broad set of learning opportunities throughout the year, there may be times when there is particular emphasis on aspects of the curriculum, for example on music making and dance, or investigations of living things. Alternatively, a set of learning experiences may be clustered around seasonal or other themes, or local events, festivals or outings. Long-term planning provides a picture of how these are providing children with a broad and balanced range of learning experiences over a period.

Short-term planning allows observations and assessments of children's development and learning to shape the weekly or daily programme. In setting out a range of learning opportunities, plans therefore need to take account of what individual children and small groups of children have recently learned and of their current needs and interests.

Planning should also be flexible so that it can take account of children's ideas and responses to learning experiences and allow learning to develop spontaneously. When there has been a need to alter a plan, future plans should be reviewed and adjusted to ensure that a broad and balanced range of learning continues to be provided or that goals for learning are revised. In this way the learning opportunities provided should be influenced by and responsive to children's interests within an overall long-term plan.

Observation and assessment during staff interaction

It is from observation and assessment of children at play that we learn how and what they learn. Yet it is not possible to observe everything where large numbers of children are involved in a range of play. This means that observation and assessment should be focused and selective. For example, at different times observation and assessment might be focused on:

- a particular goal for learning for an individual or small group of children that has been set out in planning
- all of the learning of an individual child for a short period
- the responses of children who choose a particular learning experience, for example a visit to the book corner.

To be of value, observation and assessment must influence the learning situation. As observation and assessment often take place during interactions with children at play, one use of assessment is to make staff realise where additional support or challenge is required for individuals or groups of children. In this case observation and assessment should lead to immediate action as a result of the observation. Much valuable information about children's learning is gained when staff also take time to observe children when they are playing without adult support.

Sometimes assessment evidence may lead to a brief note that will be followed up in later reflection or discussion with other staff. Evaluation of the observations can be used in planning, for example to practise a skill or offer a new learning experience or to direct staff support for the following day or week. Observation is useful in helping staff to evaluate the effectiveness of their provision and of their interactions during learning.

Recording

Day-to-day records of observations and assessments help staff to plan learning experiences that take account of children's needs and development. Records should also provide a profile of each child's progress in different aspects of their development and learning. Profiles will provide the information required to report to parents, colleagues and other professionals.

Record keeping should be kept manageable: too detailed record keeping takes time away from interacting with children in learning and teaching. It should concentrate on what is significant in children's learning rather than attempt to record everything that happens.

Staff in some centres use notebooks, diaries or checklists to record observations that are then used in making plans to develop children's learning. This recognises a link between planning and recording. Planning helps to focus what is recorded and the observations made during learning influence future planning, setting out the next steps in learning.

Such records can be used to build up a profile of each child's progress in learning. Alternatively, from time to time during the year staff may complete parts of a profile as a way of taking stock of children's progress. Profiles should include, for each of the key aspects of children's development and learning, brief comments on significant strengths and development needs observed during a child's learning. They can also include photographs and examples of children's work.

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Reporting

Reporting is a means of promoting partnership with parents and of sharing information with children, colleagues and other professionals, and determining the next steps in learning. Some early years settings start a profile when a child is preparing to start the early years setting. Parents and children complete statements such as 'I can . . .' and 'I enjoy . . .' with pictures or photographs and statements. This involves children in recognising their capabilities and values the learning that they have already achieved.

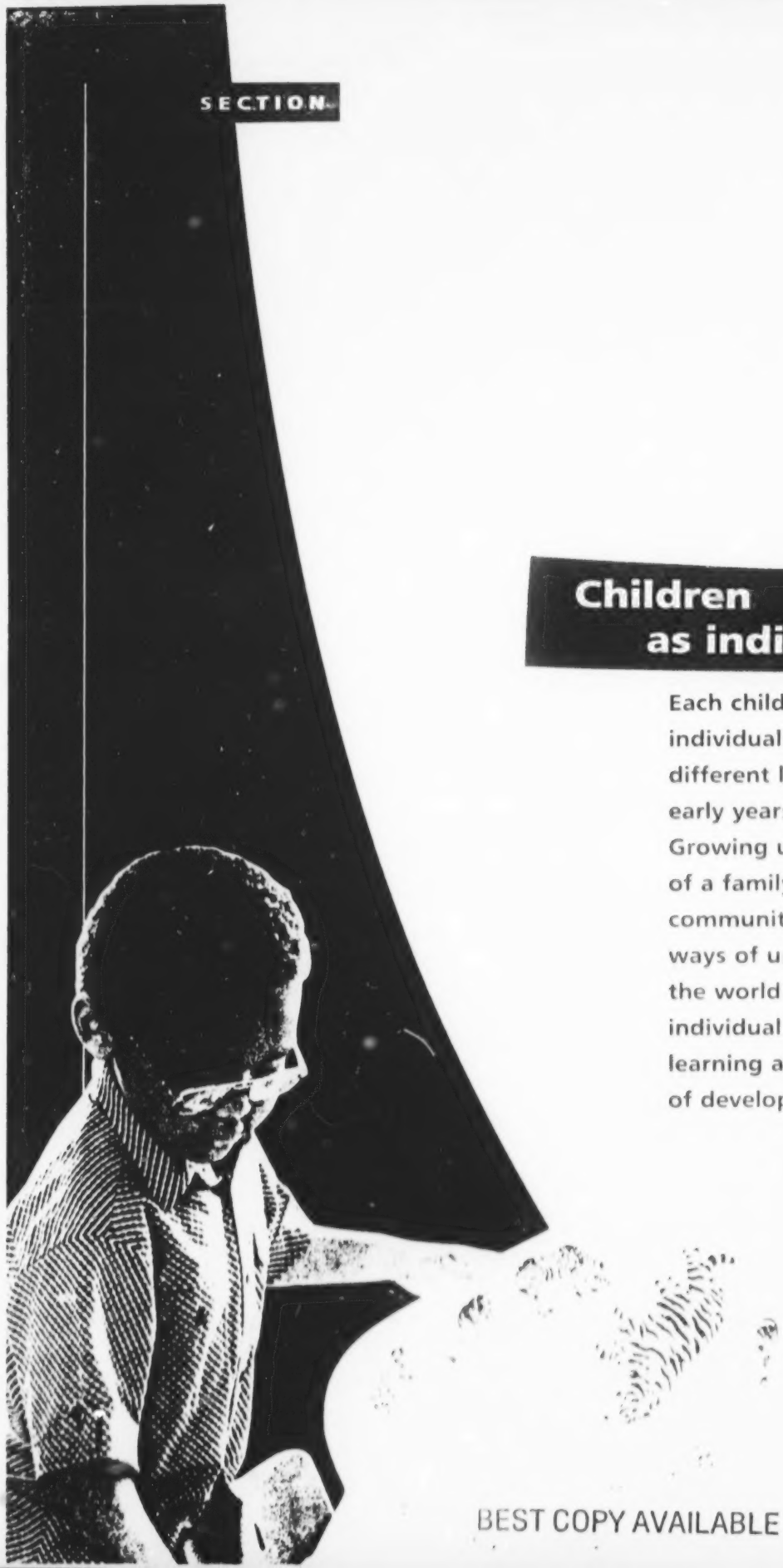
Using opportunities for informal reporting to parents during day-to-day contacts and sending home examples of children's work will continue this process. Profiles can be developed by staff in the way described above. Children can be involved in self-assessment, for example by discussing photographs or examples of work that might be included in profiles. Information from parents about learning at home can also be included. Profiles will provide evidence for making oral and written reports to parents. This information can also be shared with primary schools and other professionals.

Evaluating

Reflecting on observations and assessment is an important part of staff development. It involves thinking about what has worked well in providing learning experiences and in interacting with children. It involves thinking about improvements that could have been made to help learning take place more effectively, for example by asking a question in a different way, providing a different resource, or challenging children more during an interaction. Evaluating aspects of children's learning over time will help in judging whether the learning experiences and interactions are helping them to make good progress. Discussing all of this with other staff will help in promoting children's learning effectively.

Promoting Learning: Assessing Children's Progress 3 to 5, published by and available from Scottish CCC, provides additional advice on Section 3 of these guidelines.

SECTION



Children as individuals

Each child is a unique individual. Each brings a different life story to the early years setting. Growing up as a member of a family and community with unique ways of understanding the world creates an individual pattern of learning and pace of development.

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Children as individuals

Each child is a unique individual. Each brings a different life story to the early years setting. Growing up as a member of a family and community with unique ways of understanding the world creates an individual pattern of learning and pace of development. It helps determine the child's views and attitudes.

In order to plan learning experiences that will meet each individual child's needs it is important to find out as much as possible about the child and to build on this by

- working together with home and families
- taking account of special educational needs
- fostering equal opportunities
- collaborating with other agencies
- supporting transitions.

Working together with home and families

Parents are children's prime educators in their earliest years and they continue to play a major role in their young child's learning when they enter the early years setting. Staff should value the role of parents in their children's learning and work to create a genuine partnership with them. When staff and parents work together to support children's learning, it can have significant positive effects on the way in which children value themselves and those around them.

The starting point for this partnership is the pre-entry visit to the early years setting. As well as welcoming and familiarising children and parents with the new setting, this provides an opportunity to involve parents and children in discussion about the child's achievements to date. Continued two-way communication is important to a successful partnership. Regular informal contacts as children are brought to the early years setting and collected are useful for exchanging information about children.

Displays of children's work and photographs with captions explaining the learning gained from activities and experiences will help to share the aims of education with parents. Clear and well-presented written communication in a prospectus or handbook and newsletters can keep parents up to date. Where possible these should be provided in the different languages used by parents.

Open days and meetings can provide a useful opportunity to discuss the curriculum with parents. An important focus of such meetings should be to reaffirm the contribution of parents to their children's learning and to suggest ways of supporting learning at home.

There are opportunities for informal reporting to parents during day-to-day contacts. It is good practice to provide oral reports to parents (for example after children have settled in and again towards the end of a year) and a written report on their progress and achievement.

Parents should be involved in settling children into the early years setting. The process is eased where parents are welcome to stay and play with the children until their child is confident with staff and other children. This also assists staff discussion with parents of how their child is settling into their new setting. Partnership can also be strengthened by encouraging parents to see themselves as active and valued members of the early years community, involved in day-to-day learning experiences, planning and participating in events and visits, organising social events and helping to raise funds for specific projects.

Taking account of special educational needs

Special educational needs arise from difficulties in learning or barriers to learning. Many of the difficulties that young children experience are temporary and will be resolved as they develop and learn. Many of them will relate to specific aspects of learning such as speech or language development. Careful consideration should be given as to when advice and expertise is required from external agencies, particularly where support may be important to parents.

Where additional support is needed to help children to progress, careful observation and assessment will help in finding out the different ways in which the child learns successfully and in identifying particular needs. An individualised educational programme should be drawn up indicating a range of approaches that will build on the child's strengths as a learner and tackle barriers to learning. Additional support such as individual attention, teaching and special resources can be planned. There should be regular reviews of the child's progress when targets can be agreed for future action.

A very small proportion of children face difficulties that are long term, requiring more help than is usually available in most early years settings. Their progress will need to be kept under regular review by the early years setting and by other professionals and parents. Here, a Record of Needs may be opened for the child.

Useful advice on these matters can be found in the HMI report *Effective Provision for Special Educational Needs* (SOED, 1994). This report also recommends that the information given to parents includes a statement about the arrangements that have been made to provide for children with special educational needs.

If an early years setting makes provision for a child who has a Record of Needs, staff must be familiar with the relevant legislation and with requirements set out in the child's Record.

The needs of very able children are not specifically referred to in the relevant legislation. Giftedness, in itself, is not regarded as giving rise to special educational needs. However, careful planning and staff interaction should ensure that more able children are challenged appropriately.

Fostering equal opportunities

It is important that children from the earliest stages are helped to recognise that there are many different ways of seeing and understanding the world. These different ways depend on a range of cultural, social and religious viewpoints. Children's self-image is enhanced when their cultural heritage, gender, beliefs and the lifestyles of their families are respected, acknowledged and used in the planning of educational experiences and activities.

Taking account of the interests and skills emerging from the diversity that children and their families bring to the early years setting enriches learning experiences. A multicultural approach to the curriculum in the early years setting can be particularly fostered by the attitudes and behaviours of the adults involved.

Activities that encourage cultural awareness can be integrated into various areas of play, especially in the use of music and books, in role play in the house, in preparing foods from different cultures and in celebrating religious and cultural festivals. The creation of a stimulating visual environment in which there are photographs, paintings, prints and textiles reflecting different cultural traditions can also do much to enhance the early years setting.

Girls and boys should be given opportunities to participate equally in the full range of learning experiences, playing with a wide variety of tools and equipment. Care should be taken that particular activities do not become associated with boys or girls. All children should be encouraged, forexample, to play in the house and play with construction toys and woodwork tools.

Books, pictures, jigsaws, stories, rhymes and puzzles should be selected to show positive images of people of different races and cultures, and show girls, boys, men and women in a range of roles. Children may need to have their awareness of issues of equal treatment raised through discussion. Racist and sexist remarks and incidents, if they occur, should be dealt with positively and constructively.

Children with disability also have a right to equal access to the curriculum and an entitlement that their capabilities are fully developed. Where children with disability are attending the early years setting, care should be taken to ensure that there is suitable access to the building, resources and equipment and that staff and children recognise their capabilities.

Collaborating with other agencies

A commitment to social inclusion is at the heart of current policy on early education and childcare. This is promoted through broadly based and integrated support for children and families, involving education, health and social services and based on the guiding principles of meeting the needs and best interests of the child and their family and ensuring that every child feels included.

Before admission and subsequently throughout the year other professionals may be involved formally or informally with the child and family. These professionals may include a paediatrician, an educational psychologist, a speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist and learning support staff.

In working with other professionals an ethos of mutual trust and openness is essential as is respect for the range of skills and expertise that each contributes to a co-ordinated service for children and their families.

At the heart of inter-professional collaboration is the need for early identification and assessment, which can be used to develop an appropriate individual educational programme for each child.

Supporting transitions

Transitions occur throughout early childhood. They occur at different times as a young child moves from home to an early years setting, from one early years setting to a different one and when a child moves from an early years setting to primary school. Some children may experience a wide range of transitions, even within a single day.

Changes can be stressful, but for three-year-olds who are beginning to gain experience outside the home they can be particularly upsetting.

The key to smooth transitions for children is effective communication between child, parents and staff and the creation of a positive and supportive climate for both the parent and the child. From home to early years setting communication needs to be two-way with staff informing parents about expectations but also listening carefully to parents' concerns and hopes for their children.

Each early years setting should have its own policy on 'settling in', which is shared with parents. The process may involve home visits, information evenings, and prior visits to the early years setting. However, the time taken for each child to settle in will depend on the needs of the individual. Some children will take longer than others, some may show signs of unsettled behaviour after appearing to settle in well and the need for a supportive adult must always be carefully considered.

As children get ready to start primary school they need time to talk about any fears and anxieties they might have. Adults play a vital role in listening sensitively and helping to prepare them for this exciting and positive change, which is an important part of growing up.

In Section 1 of this guideline it was stated that:

'The vital contribution of pre-school education lies in developing and broadening the range of children's learning experiences, to leave them confident, eager and enthusiastic learners who are looking forward to school.' Good liaison with the receiving primary school is essential if continuity and progression in children's development and learning is to be achieved. Liaison about the curriculum helps to develop a shared understanding of continuity in learning between pre-school and primary education. The curriculum guidelines for 5–14 set out opportunities for developing knowledge and understanding, skills and attitudes in five curriculum areas. There are clear links between the curriculum discussed in this document for children 3–5 and the 5–14 programme.

The diagram on the page opposite shows some of the important areas of continuity and progression between this framework and the 5–14 curriculum. For example, children's achievements in communication and language should continue to be developed across the curriculum at the early stages of primary school but they will particularly inform planned learning opportunities in English language. Staff in both sectors should be aware of these links. Where staff are involved in the transition from pre-school to school, they should be aware of the curriculum guidelines for each of the sectors. Liaison is therefore important in the transfer of information about children's earlier experiences, including their strengths, difficulties and interests, so that primary school staff can plan for continued development and progression in learning. Meetings and pupil profiles built up over time in the pre-school setting can be valuable ways of achieving transfer of information. Primary staff have a responsibility to use this information in planning learning programmes that take account of children's prior learning and achievement.

An important purpose of liaison is to ensure a smooth and confident entry for children to primary school. Meetings for parents and visits to primary school help to familiarise children with their new school and its teachers and allow discussions between staff. Visits by primary teachers to pre-school settings allow them to meet and observe children in their familiar surroundings and to discuss their observations with staff.

Curriculum Framework 3–5	5–14 Curriculum Guidelines
Emotional, Personal and Social Development	Personal and Social Development
	Religious and Moral Education
Knowledge and Understanding of the World	Environmental Studies
	Mathematics
Communication and Language	English Language
Expressive and Aesthetic Development	Expressive Arts
Physical Development and Movement	

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